

ISRAEL'S "BRAND" IN THE WORLD - **WHAT IT MEANS** Larry Weinberg, Jerusalem post, 11/11/06

In the summer of 2003, former prime minister Ariel Sharon said of Israelis to *Newsweek* magazine: "Because of the conflict, we often have a gun in our hand, and the world cannot see the fields in which we lead and the good things we do."

This observation begs two questions: If Israel holds a gun in one hand, what does she do with her other hand and, why doesn't the world see that hand as well? This creates a useful metaphor to use in exploring whether or not Israel should "brand" itself.

Sad and true is the fact that Israelis must be vigilant about security; it is necessary for many to bear arms every day against those who would destroy the Jewish state.

Yet it is also true that each day many more Israelis do other things with their hands, things that add value to life around the world. They conduct research into diseases and create medicines and devices to better treat them. They create art, film, literature and music that make the world more beautiful. They invent technologies that make the world safer, businesses more efficient and life a bit easier. They raise families that love and celebrate life. Every day, Israelis use one hand for defense and the other hand to make the world a better place.

And yet as Sharon noted, this goes unseen by the world.

As *The Jerusalem Post* reported, the Foreign Ministry recently convened a group of marketing professionals - largely volunteers - to brainstorm and discuss Israel's brand in the world.

Like it or not, Israel, like every entity, company, product or nation, has a brand; the question considered was what Israelis should do to better manage theirs. Some critics and some media have used the term "makeover" to describe the branding process, but that shorthand is neither correct nor fair.

"A brand is a promise; a good brand is a promise kept," noted one expert who spoke. What then are the promises Israel and her people make to the world, and are they kept? Well, Israel promises that it will defend its people, its sovereignty and its existence as a democratic Jewish state, no matter what. The history of the past 58 years shows how well this promise has been kept at the cost of many brave lives; research on Israel's brand shows how completely this reality has shaped Israel's current brand in the world.

BUT IS security the only thing about Israelis the world should see or know? The question for the branding group, myself among them, became, "What else can Israelis promise - and deliver on - to show the world who they are?"

The answer is found in the essence of who Israelis are and what kind of society they create, and that is what the essence of Israel's brand must be. It must include the reality of the security issues of course, the hand already seen. But the reality of what Israel is in the 21st century can only be shown by the work of the other hand, the one it uses to be a valuable member of the world community each day, and the lives led by Israelis each day.

So the branding workgroup started a process that can only be completed by ordinary Israelis when they embrace a vision and make the promises that will complete Israel's brand. Claims in the press that the brand will show Israel to be a fun, libertine paradise blissfully unaware or unaffected by the rigors of the conflict are at best oversimplifications and at worst determined disinformation.

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's admirable desire to close the gap between world perceptions of Israel and the reality of Israel is as legitimate a purpose as defense of the nation's security measures or the pursuit of political justice. The branding process doesn't preempt or replace these efforts, it augments them. It asks the world to know Israelis by the full scope of their society.

Some believe Israel is best served by focusing attention on the evils of her enemies. Elections are sometimes won by negative campaigns, but in the long term, respect and affinity - what marketers refer to as brand equity - can only be

earned by focusing on the positive. With Israelis creating so much value for so many, there is so much that is positive to focus on and great potential for success.

Ariel Sharon was only partly right; the world sees the gun because that is the only Israeli hand that is seen. It's time to for Israelis to hold that "other" hand up high - the hand that makes the world a better place, the one that creates a vibrant society, that celebrates life, the one that embraces all colors and creeds. And while they're at it, Israelis ought to hold their heads high, too. They have a lot to be proud of. It's time to tell the world.

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